

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR DON KNABE

February 09, 2010

Is there a better way than a police car to transport people (Section 5150 detainees) to the hospital for the involuntary psychiatric hold for the up to 72 hours evaluation period allowed by law? Is the current use of peace officers for this the best choice for the detainee, the peace officer, and the general public?

These issues were raised by an ad hoc Committee of the County's Emergency Medical Services Commission. They merit our attention.

The Committee was comprised of representatives from the County Peace Officers Association, Mental Health, Health Services, Fire, Sheriff, the Commissions of Mental Health and Emergency Medical Services, the Hospital Association of Southern California, Protection and Advocacy Inc., the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, Disability Rights of California, and the County Ambulance Association. Based on the

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findings of this distinguished group, the County Commissions on Emergency Medical Services and Mental Health jointly recommend that the Board of Supervisors convene an inter-professional, multi-disciplinary study group to determine the most appropriate mechanism of transport for 5150's detained by peace officers.

The ad hoc Committee found that it can take a peace officer many hours to transport a detainee to a psychiatric hospital and to arrange involuntary admission under Section 5150 of California's Welfare and Institutions Code. This is valuable peace officer time and cost taken away from law enforcement to perform a function better performed by specifically trained civilian personnel. The Committee also noted that 5150 detainees transported by peace officers are generally placed handcuffed in the back of police cruisers and concluded that this mode of transport benefits neither the detainee or the public.

These issues affects thousands of people. Data from the County Department of Health Services, which operates all the hospitals funded to receive uninsured 5150 detainees, indicates that these three hospitals alone currently receive more than 14,000 detainees per year, of which more than 7,000 are brought by peace officers.

Mental health experts suggest that a better system of pre-hospital care and evaluation as well as transport for 5150 detainees could do more than just free up law enforcement resources. It might also reduce the public cost of detainee hospital care by reducing the number of psychiatric hospital admissions and patient days.

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I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board:

1. Establish an executive-level group to oversee a study on improving pre-hospital care and transport of 5150 detainees to be organized, convened, and chaired by the CEO or his executive level CEO subordinate and to consist of representatives from the County Emergency Medical Services and Mental Health Commissions, the Countywide Criminal Justice Coordination Committee, the Departments of Sheriff, Fire, Mental Health and Health Services, the Los Angeles Police Department, Protection and Advocacy, Inc., the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill and similar organizations, and any other representatives the CEO deems appropriate.
2. Instruct and authorize the CEO to provide or arrange for necessary staff and consulting support to the executive study group within existing resources.
3. Initially ask the study group to submit a report proposing a “most-appropriate-and-feasible” system of pre-hospital response, to include field assessment and transport, for possible 5150 detentions. The report should include summaries of public testimony and comment and analysis of actual cases; review of current systems, utilization and costs in Los Angeles County, and descriptions of innovative systems and resulting experience in other jurisdictions.
4. Request that the CEO report back within 120 days on the 5150 Study Group’s formation, initial meetings, plan of work and timetable.

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